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AUTHOR Fagan, Edward R.
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ABSTRACT

Reading in the writing classroom can be defined as a cluster of arbitrary categories, each with its own effect on the reading/writing process. Given this definition, it can be said that (1) perceptions significantly affect both reading and writing, (2) attitudes are factors in reading and writing, (3) rhetorical triangles are useful in teaching reading/writing paradigms, (4) literature and writing need a common basis for study, (5) standardized tests do not reflect reading competency, (6) recall does not equal comprehension, and (7) writing is a skill that all students can learn. Teaching activities developed for each category may overlap, but when applied, these activities might heighten students' awareness of bonds between reading and writing and perhaps increase their skills in both areas. For example, activities to enhance perceptual skills may involve sequencing, outlining, and the use of allusions or emotional words. Those for attitude may involve attention to details and dialect. Rhetorical activities may give focus to the development of a main idea, facts to substantiate ideas, and sentence structure, while activities for literature may delve into emotions in a character and figures of speech. Test activities may focus on general vocabulary and circuitous language, while recall activities deal with inference and relationships. Finally, possible activities for writing deal with reading for writing using contrast, question and answer, repetition, conclusions and proof, and problem solution. (HOD)

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Reading in the Writing Classroom

Edward R. Fagan

The Pennsylvania State University

Background and Assumptions

Bonds between reading and writing are strong to weak depending upon which expert you cite. Smith (1975) notes that "There are radical differences between the skills and effort employed in reading and writing, and our writing system might be regarded as a compromise between the interest of the readers and the interests of the writer." Estes and Vaughn (1978) write that "Writing and reading are in some ways mirror images of one another." Other reading definitions (encoding/decoding, perceptual matching) could be added just as explorations of rhetoric and its ramifications could expand writing definitions.

My point in rehearsing myriad definitions of reading and writing are: 1) to meet the research convention which says "define your terms," and 2) to ask your indulgence for my in context definitions which focus more on applications of reading and writing than on their one hundred or more definitions.

With such backgrounds, my assumptions about reading in the writing classroom are these:

--perceptions significantly affect both reading and writing

--attitudes are factors, pro and con, in reading and writing

--rhetorical triangles are useful teaching reading/writing paradigms

--literature and writing need a common basis for study

--standardized tests do not reflect reading competency

--recall does not equal comprehension

--writing is a skill which all students can learn

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What follows is an attempt to support these assumptions about reading in the writing classroom by providing information or examples from the research literature or from classroom experiences.

Perception

By now, most teachers are familiar with the field-ground aspects of perception; for example, the black vase centered between two white face profiles which force the observer to see either the vase or the profiles but not both simultaneously. More applicable in the reading/writing context would be the placement of the graphic, 13 within a string of numbers, 12 , 13 , 14 or a string of letters A , 13 , C . These are visual field/ground images. Smith (1975) uses cultural field ground images which also affect meaning:

> Mom is cooking in the kitchen.
>
> Dad is cooking in the kitchen.
>
> Chicken is cooking in the kitchen.
>
> Cabbage is cooking in the kitchen.

Fine. But we can not say, "Mom and cabbage are cooking in the kitchen," even though we can say "Cabbage and chicken are cooking in the kitchen." There is no grammatical rule which precludes the Mom/cabbage combination. It's a learned cultural perception. One more example: "The none tolled hymn she had scene a pare of bear feet in her rheum." Only from sound and perception could the message, the content of that sentence, be obtained. Knowing the denotative meaning of the words and the grammatical pattern does not help. Knowing how to read it and to write it does not help because, meaning in this case, is a cultural perception phenomenon.

These perceptual examples are exaggerations, but more subtle examples occur daily within our students' reading assignments and especially in non-print situations:

film, television, body language and the like. Later in this presentation we'll look at examples of this phenomena within classroom materials.

Attitudes

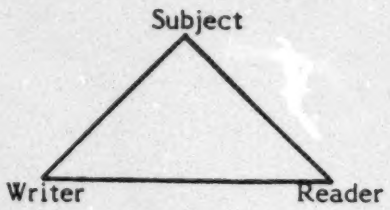
Lindemann (1982) uses a series of illustrations to show that students' attitudes toward dialects have strong impacts on their abilities to read and write. Peck (1982) and other supporting reports make it obvious that teacher understanding about the effect of dialects in reading and writing are prerequisite to effective teaching. There's a hidden agenda, too, and that is the media authenticity of the dialect for the group being presented. The language of Blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans in films, television shows, as well as in print is frequently stereotypical and denigrating interferes with students' comprehension in all media forms. The nature of this interference is detailed in books such as Gunderson's (1970) Language and Reading and Holt's (1977) "How Teachers Make Children Hate Reading." Holt points out that the "painful" classroom reading experience some students have makes them avoid books then and later generalizes to their avoidance of all books inside or outside the classroom.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the American Library Association (ALA) and many state associations have checklists or criteria which can be used to judge the authenticity of minority protrayals in contemporary fiction and non-fiction. Attentiveness to those sources can help remove some of the "pain" created by unjust images and faulty dialects which contribute so much to students' negative attitudes toward reading and writing.

Triangles

Without laboring the pros and cons of rhetorical triangles as teaching gimmicks for reading and writing, suffice it to say they have the advantages of being concrete,

simple and manageable in classroooms, K-12. Lindemann (1982, p. 205) illustrates one of the triangles as follows:



Teachers can use this triangle (and others, for example: topic, audience, style) to impress students with the need to balance triangle elements. Or the triangles can be used as an evaluation device to show students where imbalance on one or more of the elements occurs in reading and/or writing, and the kinds of distortion such imbalance presents in a rhetorical situation. Agreed, that the triangle is arbitrary, that (depending upon purpose of the writing) it might be unnecessary, that it has procrustean implications (that is, forcing a piece of writing into a predetermined form) still it's a useful gimmick which provides one simple model for students to evaluate their writing. Many composition teachers disagree with the use of triangular models for examining writing; they feel that it is one (and only one) of several different ways students might organize to write. Still, as a gimmick, the rhetorical triangle has helped some students to organize their ideas before writing and to judge the effectiveness of some reading assignments.

Literature

While rhetorical triangles can also be used to explore literature, the richness of the literature frequently gets lost within the austere angles. Yet there is a considerable body of research literature which, summed, presents strong evidence that a major source for the improvement of student writing is the reading of literature. One of the qualifications for such judgments, though, as Comprone (1976) points out is

that students might be asked to compose an essay" without ever being taught to understand how the essays they have read were themselves composed."

Similarly, the Conant (1959) dictum which led to the "essay-a-week" recommendation as a means for improving writing was effectively refuted by a controlled experiment which showed that reading, when substituted for the required "essay-a-week" three out of the four weeks per month, was more effective in the improvement of students' essay writing. Reasons for the superiority of reading in such contexts are apparent: the essay-a-week students ran out of topics, became bored, had to strain for sources of writing invention, whereas the readers who wrote an essay once a month had wider choices of topics and higher interests because of those choices.

Tests

Standardized tests measure weaknesses more than strengths. Judy (1980) supports that judgment when he notes that test makers in order to create a curve -

> search for items some people will get right and others will get wrong. If 100 percent of test takers got an item right, the test maker would remove it from the battery because it would not produce any useful information. Thus, tests literally seek out weaknesses and ignore competencies or knowledges that are possessed by a majority of test takers.

Such procedures, Judy continues, tend to emphasize trivia in obscure areas of all disciplines. Wilson (1982) adds to Judy's observations by noting that test-wise students who perform well probably do so because of their test experiences-not their reading competencies. These test influences on students' writing tend to make them use such obscure trivia in conundrum form as rhetorical models for emphasizing an idea or developing a thesis statement.

Recall

Some of the thinking related to standardized testing in reading and writing shapes reading beliefs which hold that the ability to recall details within a piece of writing means that students can comprehend the full meaning of the reading passage. Barrett and Johnson (1973) question that logic by pointing out that comprehension skills include "identifying a topic, stating a main idea and related details, establishing details, establishing sequence, drawing conclusions, and discriminating relevant and irrelevant details." One theory which embodies these comprehension skills according to Stauffer (1980) is a language experience approach. Such an approach provides language experiences which are dynamic, process-centered sessions where students think out loud, read and write. Not only can such children recall details well, they can think. Some educators regard the language experience approach as strictly for elementary schools but as Moffett (1968) has demonstrated, that approach can be just as effective in the secondary school when directed by skilled English/reading teachers.

Writing

Writing as part of the language arts should not be separated from the others, reading, speaking and listening. In some schools, it is still used as punishment for misbehaving students, in other schools, as a special privilege for better students. But writing as integrated language art has an effect out of proportion to other disciplines according to Thornton (1980) who writes, "It is by their ability to write that pupils will, in the end, succeed or fail in the education system." While Thornton may exaggerate somewhat, it is Gans (1979) who provides the perception needed for reading in the writing classroom:

> Natural, often student- suggested, and spontaneous reading leads to writing....and once they write something of their own unaided, one can almost see them sprout.

Conclusion

Reading in the writing classroom was described as a cluster of arbitrary categories each with its own effect on the reading/writing process. Below, are listed activities under each category which may overlap but which, when applied, might heighten students' awareness of bonds between reading/writing and perhaps increase their skills in both areas. Details and other examples of these processes can be found within the reference section of this article.

Perception

I. Sequencing, Outlining

- A. Make a time line of the story
  - 1. change descriptive passage into narrative for better comprehension
  - 2. find remarks suggesting coming events
- B. Character change or development in a story
  - 1. describe character at beginning, middle, and end of story
  - 2. list, step by step, the factors that caused the change
- C. Organization
  - 1. notice order of topics
  - 2. what is the significance of the order
- D. Logic of article or argument
  - 1. list steps that prove point
  - 2. question assumptions until proven

II. Allusions, Emotional Words

- A. Literary allusions
  - 1. check the context for clues
  - 2. recall previous uses of allusion

3. check dictionary for symbolic meanings
4. check Bartlett's quotations

B. Emotional words

1. be aware of power of words that distort or blot out important relationships
2. appreciate the power of words in building character in fiction
3. notice whether author chooses words to strengthen viewpoint

Attitudes

I. Details

A. Techniques

1. note author's method of making a passage vivid
2. note character traits that cause likes or dislikes

B. Description

1. judge plausibility of events
2. do the events justify the ending
3. list details in a description

II. Dialect

A. Decide whether the words are short forms of those you already know

B. What is accomplished by the use of dialect

Rhetoric

I. Main Idea

A. Main idea stated specifically in a paragraph

1. underline statement and interpret
2. relate main idea of the part to that of the whole

B. Main idea inferred

1. title these paragraphs
2. list information given
3. prove this is the author's idea

C. Facts to substantiate ideas

1. find actual facts
2. note opinions and generalizations
3. find details that justify ideas
4. be wary of words that prompt favorable or unfavorable reactions
5. denote bias of writer by suggestive words

II. Sentences

A. Sentence inversion

1. note purpose: suspense, variety, emphasis, etc.
2. note variety

B. Sentence length and complexity

1. analyze sentence
2. subject, predicate, clauses, etc.

C. Compact writing

1. read sentence carefully
2. reread sentence and check word definitions

Literature

I. Emotion or feeling in a character

A. Note clues

1. what character says or does
2. what character is said to think
3. what others say or do about him
4. symbolism in the environment

B. Piece them together

C. Generalize into emotion or feeling

II. Figures of Speech

A. Show how an object is described in

1. simile

2. metaphor

3. onomatopoeia

B. Note the variety caused by the use of these figures

Tests

I. General vocabulary

A. Determine meaning by context

B. Use dictionary

C. Use Thesaurus

D. Vocabulary lists

E. Semantics and word derivations

II. Circuitous language

A. Approach each phase individually

B. Add each of the meanings to obtain total idea

C. Abbreviations--check dictionary

D. Abstract words

1. note implications throughout context

2. note dictionary meanings for additional meanings

Recall

I. Inferring, Drawing Conclusions

A. Predicting events

1. consider background situation, characters involved
2. note what is said and done
3. decide what is likely to happen next
4. do factors justify another result than the one predicted

B. Comparison with own experience

1. compare writer's experience with your own
2. tell similarities or differences
3. can author teach you anything for your living

C Propaganda

1. compare known and unknown facts
2. draw conclusion based on the facts
3. note the author's opinions

II. Seeing Relationship

A. Author's point of view (evidences)

1. characters' words and actions
2. events that happen to character
3. outright statements of opinions
4. title of the story

B. In poems

1. each stanza has an event
2. note relationship of each stanza

Writing

I. Reading for Writing

A. Contrast

1. parallel ideas are used
2. thoughts reinforce each other

B. Question-Answer

1. note question author asks
2. note the answer

C. Repetition

1. main idea stated more than once in different words
2. emphasis is created

D. Conclusion-Proof

1. central meaning is stated
2. facts backup conclusion

E. Problem-Solution

1. complication is presented
2. resolution is necessary

These are a few ways to exploit reading in the writing classroom. They have been used by English/reading teachers for years but are clustered here to make them more convenient for those of us who want to help our students see the bonds between the two areas. If students can learn to see those bonds, their experiences with the language arts should be much more rewarding.

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